

15<sup>th</sup> March 2026. 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent – Mothering Sunday.

Prayer for today.

God of compassion, whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, shared the life of a home in Nazareth, and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself; strengthen us in our daily living that in joy and in sorrow we may know the power of your presence to bind together and to heal; through Jesus Christ your son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Among those who are sick we pray for Rosemary Belshaw, Will Sadler, Leo Pyle, John Gibson, Brenda Clark, Elizabeth Wood, Nigel Baty-Symes, Andrew McKendrick, Graeme Common, Kate Marris, Maureen Stevens, Prue and Nancy, Ned Ryan, Daniel Bosman, Suzie Dent, Nick Cook, Christina Baldwin, Lorraine Dodd, Kathleen Lee, Carol McKendrick, Stuart Bell, Maggie Bennett, Elizabeth Sambell, and Heather Loughead.

Among those who have died we remember Sheila Borthwick, and also William Robson, Florence Newby, Isabella Little, William Dixon and John Andrew Reed, whose year's mind is about this time.

Invitation to prayer: Lord, meet us in the silence

Response: **And hear our prayer.**

Readings:

Exodus 2: 1-10

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman,<sup>2</sup> and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months.<sup>3</sup> But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile.<sup>4</sup> His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

<sup>5</sup> Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river-bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it.<sup>6</sup> She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. 'This is one of the Hebrew babies,' she said.

<sup>7</sup> Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?'

<sup>8</sup> 'Yes, go,' she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother.<sup>9</sup> Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the baby and nursed him.<sup>10</sup> When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.'

John 19: 25-27

<sup>25</sup> Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.<sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to her, 'Woman, here is your son,'<sup>27</sup> and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Thoughts on today's readings

Today is Mothering Sunday. It is a day of refreshment, a day of rest in the middle of the rather sober and serious season of Lent. I associate it with the thought of servant girls in Victorian England being given a day to go home to their mothers from their place of work, bringing a cake which they had baked as a sign of their love. Today it is very much about children showing their love and appreciation for their mothers ( and husbands showing love and appreciation for their wives!), but today's readings both bring a very different aspect on motherhood through the words of the Bible.

Our first reading recounts the compassion and generous love of an Egyptian woman, the daughter of Pharaoh. Her father hates and fears the Hebrews: he seeks to neutralise their perceived threat by cruel treatment and enslavement, and even by the murder of their children. But here is his own daughter, who sees only the child, the baby, helpless and seemingly abandoned, and gives him herself as his mother. There is nothing here of the assumed racism, the unthinking fear and hatred of the other which elsewhere pervades the Old Testament. The daughter of Pharaoh knows that this baby is a Hebrew – she chooses to use her power to protect him. She even enables his birth mother, the daughter of Levi, to care for him until he is weaned, and makes sure she has the means of doing so. She becomes his mother because she loves him, and because this is the purpose of God. As his mother she gives him his name, an Egyptian name, Moses, and an identity as a prince of Egypt. We know that in time God will appear to Moses and call him to lead his own people to freedom from the Egyptians. For now he is a helpless child: his life depends on the compassion of a woman who is the daughter of the enemy of his people. She has chosen him as her son, and so she is his mother.

Our first reading is therefore about motherhood as the adoption of a son, and our Gospel reading is also about adoption: the adoption of the mother of Jesus by his beloved disciple, and her adoption of him as her son. That this is the will and purpose of God is underlined in the words of Christ from the cross. For on the cross Jesus is the Christ, God's chosen and anointed son. He is the one lifted up, as it was foretold. Obedient to death, he is the one who is the source of life for those who look upon him, and believe. And so it is with the authority of God that he tells the disciple he loves, 'This is your mother,' and to his mother, 'This is your son.'

And so from that time to this she is honoured as a mother by disciples who love and follow her Son; as she proclaimed, 'All generations will call me blessed.' For the Bible, then, motherhood is not always about biology or genetics: it is a part of the purpose and activity of God through the lives of women God has called and chosen.

For me, coming to Newcastle as a curate, and hundreds of miles away from my own family, it was Ann Blair who became a mother for me, and then for my family – Ann, who gave shelter to perhaps hundreds of homeless men over the years, and who made very Christmas special for our children. Surely I saw God's hand in her life.

And what of the Church, often spoken of as "Mother?" Surely it is here I learnt about God, and indeed here that Christ found me. Surely, despite its weakness, divisions and contradictions, the Church has been for me a place of life, and demands my love and my loyalty. Throughout the history of the Church, from the great women of the early Church in this land, from Hilda, Etheldreda and their like, to Teresa of Calcutta, women have consecrated their lives

to Christ, and honoured as mother by those to whom they brought the light and love of Christ. For surely it is through such faith, and supported by such prayers that we too are brought to understand ourselves as dear children, precious and loved: children through adoption and grace of God our Father.